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ABSTRACT

A study investigated bachelor's degree completion times and related factors for students in Oklahoma higher education institutions. Data were drawn from survey information on 1,399 college freshmen in 1995 and cohort data on the entire freshman population of 37,059 in 1988. Analyses focus on comparison of students' expected and actual time-to-degree (by age, race, gender, and institution type) and on other factors of interest in time-to-degree (student employment, advanced placement courses, College Level Examination Program, course load, and transfer). A separate section discusses factors that may negatively impact time-to-degree not examined in this study (changing majors, extracurricular activities, financial aid, and remediation). Recommendations concerning time-to-degree issues culled from other state and institutional studies are also examined, and this study's recommendations are presented. Appended materials include a brief review of literature on factors influencing degree completion time and a copy of the 1995 degree completion survey. (Contains 45 endnotes.) (MSE)

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ED 416 794

TIME-TO-DEGREE COMPLETION

A SYSTEM-WIDE SURVEY

OF OKLAHOMA COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

A Report to the
Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education
by the
Council on Student Affairs

Spring 1996

HE 031 043

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TIME-TO-DEGREE COMPLETION:
A SYSTEM-WIDE SURVEY OF
OKLAHOMA COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the April 28, 1995, State Regents' meeting, the Council on Student Affairs (COSA) presented an overview of the following: (1) the programs and services provided by State System student affairs officers; (2) the impact these services have on the academic and personal growth of students; and (3) the role student services play in enhancing student success. As a result of the presentation, the Regents asked COSA to review several specific issues, including the length of time required for students to complete a baccalaureate degree.

Time-to-degree has gained interest nationwide. In the 1990s there has been a growing sense of alarm as to why fewer college students are completing a baccalaureate degree in four years. State legislators, parents, and public policy advocates, concerned about subsidizing more than four years of school, have heightened pressures for accountability on higher education.

When students enter college as freshmen they expect to finish with a bachelor's degree and do so within the traditional four years. More than half of the students have this expectation regardless of race, gender, or type of institution they are attending. But, in actuality, in a gross cohort of freshmen students, only one in twenty will graduate with a bachelor's degree within that expected four years. There are high hopes, but low results.

Many variables were identified that impact time-to-degree, including: academic preparation, changing majors, course loads, course scheduling, student expectations of time-to-degree, extracurricular activities, financial need, gender, institutional policies, race/ethnicity, and transferring, to name a few. Given the variety of variables impacting student time-to-degree, a broader perspective might be better obtained by shifting focus from time-to-degree to persistence to degree.

The following is a summary of the recommendations made by COSA as a result of its study:

<u>Decrease Credit Hours Taken</u>

- COSA recommends that the State Regents actively promote expanded use of AP courses and CLEP tests within high schools in Oklahoma to decrease the credit hours taken in college.

<u>Expand Assessment</u>

- COSA recommends that the State Regents add common elements to the current student assessment systems. This will provide an understanding of student opinions relative to time-to-degree statewide.

Enhance Persistence

- COSA recommends that the State Regents help to lessen the impact of racial stratification in academic preparation and socioeconomic status through increased coordination with primary and secondary educators and administrators to better prepare students for entry into postsecondary education.

Further Study

- COSA recommends the following elements identified in this study that impact time-to-degree be more thoroughly examined: the number of students taking courses in excess of those needed for a baccalaureate degree; the effect of students transferring credits to the degree; size of course loads; changing majors; academic advising; course scheduling, the effect of work or extracurricular activities; and, the influence of financial aid.

- COSA recommends a further study of two-year college students to ascertain their educational objectives as compared to students entering baccalaureate degree granting institutions.

- COSA recommends an in-depth assessment to determine the unique educational needs of non-traditional students (age 22 and older) and how well those needs are currently addressed by institutions within the State System, in terms of their impact on time-to-degree.

COSA believes that the State Regents' staff should examine the results of this study to determine whether or not additional elements and information such as pre-collegiate credit, extracurricular activities, etc., need to be added to the current Unitized Data System. Additionally, COSA believes that staff should conduct a study to evaluate the costs and benefits of developing a unitized financial aid data system.

Finally, COSA supports the State Regents' efforts to develop a comprehensive strategy designed to inform high school students and their parents of course work and high school preparation needed to succeed in college; and, secondly, COSA also supports the State Regents' continued development of a comprehensive strategy designed to inform high school students, their parents, teachers, and schools of whether or not the courses provided meet the required rigor to prepare students for college.

TIME-TO-DEGREE COMPLETION: A SYSTEM-WIDE SURVEY OF OKLAHOMA COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

PROLOGUE

At the April 28, 1995, State Regents' meeting, the Council on Student Affairs (COSA) presented an overview of the following: 1) the programs and services provided by State System student affairs officers; 2) the impact these services have on the academic and personal growth of students; and 3) the role student services play in enhancing student success. As a result of the presentation, the Regents asked COSA to review several specific issues, including the length of time required for students to complete a baccalaureate degree (henceforth, time-to-degree).

In its routine communication with the Student Advisory Board (SAB), COSA learned that time-to-degree completion was also on the students' list of issues to review. Subsequently, SAB took the lead in developing, disseminating, and collecting a student opinion survey that assessed, among other issues, student information regarding the length of time expected to complete a baccalaureate degree. State System institutions along with a selected group of private/independent institutions participated in the survey.

At the December 1, 1995, State Regents' meeting, the SAB presented its preliminary findings from the student opinion surveys regarding student expected time-to-degree completion and academic advising. The survey findings were formally handed over to COSA for a more in-depth analysis.

Recognizing that the State Regents have already established policy concerning student assessment,[1] COSA presents the following report to the State Regents as part of its responsibility to provide advice and recommendations concerning policy relating to students.

BACKGROUND

The traditional expectation has been that a baccalaureate degree required four years for completion. However, various studies with data from as far back as 1978 indicate that students in increasing proportion are not graduating within four years.[2]

As a result of the economic downturn of the 1980s, state legislators and other public policy advocates have heightened pressures on higher education funding through increased demands for accountability. This trend of accountability has expanded student assessment from the rate of degree completion to time-to-degree completion.[3]

In the 1990s, there has been a growing sense of alarm because fewer college students are completing a baccalaureate degree in four years. For example, state policy makers and governing boards around the country are increasingly asking why they need to subsidize

more than four years of school while parents are similarly concerned about prolonging the investment they must make financing a college education.

Other public policy makers, however, view time-to-degree in a different light. Alexander Astin,[4] noted scholar, warns that too much focus on this narrow measure of student success can serve to hurt traditionally underrepresented students -- older, poor, and minority students -- who have generally taken longer to complete their baccalaureate degrees. The Institute for Higher Education Policy recommends that "student persistence," meaning continuous enrollment to the completion of a degree or other educational or career goal, should be the primary measure of student success, not time-to-degree. Student success, the Institute says, should be viewed as part of a continuum of education that begins in elementary school and progresses through the completion of a postsecondary degree or other educational or career goal.[5]

National Perspective

There is a growing sense of concern at the national, state, and institutional levels about why fewer students are completing a baccalaureate degree in four years. In 1988, Congress passed the Student-Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act (revised 1991),[6] which among other things, requires colleges and universities receiving federal funding to disclose graduation rates for all full-time, degree-seeking freshmen. By disclosing graduation rates, Congress hopes to encourage higher education institutions to reverse the trend of increased time-to-degree.

As Table 1 indicates, the National Center for Educational Statistics reports that although many baccalaureate degree programs can be completed in four years, the majority of students are not graduating within that length of time. Only 43.3 percent of the 1990 graduates graduated in four years or less, whereas 56.7 percent took five years or more.[6]

A study by the National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities (NIICU) found similar results. Using the 1986 follow-up data from the Department of Education's High School and Beyond database, NIICU focused on students who attended four-year colleges and universities between 1980 and 1986. NIICU's findings were as follows for first-time, full-time students:

- 54 percent completed a degree in six years at private institutions;
- 48 percent completed a degree in six years at public institutions.[7]

States' Perspective

The Illinois State Board of Higher Education, in an attempt to reduce the time it takes students to earn baccalaureate degrees, improve graduation rates, and strengthen the quality of undergraduate education, convened a "Committee on Scope, Structure, and Productivity." Among its responsibilities, the committee conducted a study of state institutions of higher learning to assess the current status of time-to-degree.[8]

TABLE 1
Percentage of College Graduates Completing the Baccalaureate Degree Within Various Years of Starting College by Sex, Type of Institution, and Race/Ethnicity Year of College Graduation - 1990

Characteristics	4 or fewer years	5 or fewer years	6 or fewer years	More than 6 years
Sex:				
Male	38.9%	68.9%	80.9%	19.1%
Female	47.4%	72.5%	81.1%	18.9%
Control of Inst.:				
Public	36.1%	67.2%	79.3%	20.7%
Private	57.9%	78.1%	84.5%	15.5%
Race / Ethnicity:				
White	44.4%	71.6%	81.5%	18.5%
Black	37.0%	65.1%	77.6%	22.4%
Hispanic	31.1%	60.3%	72.9%	27.1%
Asian	44.4%	76.1%	85.1%	14.3%
American Indian	26.6%	47.7%	59.0%	41.0%
Total	43.3%	70.8%	81.0%	19.0%

Source: US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics College Graduation Surveys, *Indicator of the Month*, (October 1993).

TABLE 2
Cumulative Graduation Rates of Illinois First-Time Freshmen From 1987-88 Cohort

Group	Cumulative Graduation Rates		
	Within 4 years	Within 5 years	Within 6 years
African Americans	5.3%	12.2%	17.7%
Hispanics	12.5%	22.0%	29.9%
Other	28.4%	44.2%	52.5%
All First-Time Freshmen	25.4%	40.4%	50.5%

Source: State of Illinois Board of Higher Education (May 3, 1994).

The committee found that: (1) slightly more than half of all public university first-time freshmen earn a bachelor's degree, (2) less than three percent of freshmen complete their degrees in three academic years, and (3) about 25 percent complete their degrees in the traditional four academic years. The study concluded that 55 percent of the freshmen will eventually go on to graduate. As shown in Table 2, graduation rates of African-Americans and Hispanics were below average.[9]

Table 3 (p. 5) shows various state graduation rates for first-time-entering freshmen. The cohorts are constructed differently from state to state. In summary, these data tend to suggest a time-to-degree for first-time full-time students in public four-year institutions ranging from 15 - 33 percent after four years, and 40 - 61 percent after six years.[10]

Summary of Factors Influencing Time-to-Degree Completion

While there may be many variables that impact time-to-degree, the following factors are those most often cited as reasons why students are taking longer than four years to complete a course of study leading to a baccalaureate degree. These studies, from which this summary comes, are outlined in the Appendix.

Academic Preparation. The importance of academic preparation for timely movement of students to baccalaureate degrees cannot be overemphasized. As a University of California study (1990) found, academic preparation was a primary factor of student persistence, or continued college enrollment, to graduation.[11]

Changing Majors. Students who change majors have additional course requirements to complete; hence, often require more time to complete their baccalaureate degrees. A survey of parents' opinions showed changing majors to be the number one reason for delaying their children's graduation.[12]

Expectation of Time-To-Degree. The traditional belief has been that a baccalaureate degree can be completed in four years. It has been suggested that part of the recent increase in time-to-degree results from a change in student perspective toward (or an outright rejection of) this traditional notion.[13]

Extracurricular Activities. Extracurricular activities compete for time with course work and study, and, when students do not achieve an adequate balance, these activities may delay baccalaureate degree completion.[14]

Financial Need. The combination of rising tuition and lower per-person financial assistance has resulted in students and parents alike facing larger financial burdens. Over 71 percent of the 1995 entering freshmen expressed concern over their college finances.[15] In addition, recent trends in financial aid have been from grants to loans. Although the effect of loans on time-to-degree is not clear, increased dependence on loans places a heavier financial burden on students, especially those with modest means. For low-income minorities, in particular, one study indicated that loans reduced student persistence levels while those who received grants showed increased levels of persistence to their baccalaureate degrees.[16]

TABLE 3

Graduation Rates for First-Time-Entering Freshmen from Various States

State	Cohort*	Graduation Rates		
		Within 4 years	Within 5 years	Within 6 years
Colorado[A]	1986 Cohort, All First-Time Freshmen 1988 Cohort, All First-Time Freshmen	17.7% 14.5%	38.3% --	44.0% --
Florida[B]	1984 Freshmen Cohort State Institutions	15%	--	49%
Illinois[C]	1988-89 All First-time Freshmen	26.4%	47.8%	53.8%
Kentucky[B]	Freshmen @ Regionals Freshmen @ Doctoral Univ.	-- --	-- --	42% 45%
North Carolina	1984-85 First-time, Full-time Freshman	27%	--	56%
Texas[B]	Fall 1987 First-time, Full-time Freshmen	--	48%	--
Virginia[B]	1983 Freshmen Cohort Four-Year Public Institutions	33%	--	57%
Wisconsin[B]	1985 Full-time Freshmen	--	--	61%
Oklahoma[D]	1988 Cohort, First-time, Full-time, Degree-Seeking Freshmen	--	--	40%

*The cohorts in this section are not composed of varying populations. This table designed to merely give a rough comparison of where Oklahoma stands with regard to some other states.

Sources: [A]Colorado Commission on Higher Education (January 1994), [B]Blanco, Cheryl D., SHEEO (1994), [C]State of Illinois Board of Higher Education Study (May 3, 1994),
[D]Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, (September 1995).[17]

For the purpose of comparability, the Oklahoma population in Table 3 includes only first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen. While the Oklahoma data in Table 3. is from the same cohort as the analysis later in this report, the graduation rates are higher because that data includes only 1988 first -time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen, whereas the analysis section includes the entire population of 1988 entering freshmen, regardless of their course load.

Gender. A National Center for Education Statistics study (1993) shows time-to-degree to be lower for females than for males. Over 47 percent of the female graduates and only 40 percent of male graduates completed their baccalaureate degrees within four years.[18]

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However, by year six, about 81 percent of both male and female graduates have completed their baccalaureate degrees. These findings indicate that while a larger proportion of female than male graduates complete their baccalaureate degree within four years, by year six the gender differential in time-to-degree appears to vanish.

Institutional Factors. Institutional factors that can negatively impact time-to-degree include the unavailability of required courses, withdrawing from courses for a variety of reasons, poor academic advising, expanded degree requirements, poor scheduling of required courses, and failure to articulate the expectation that a baccalaureate degree is to be completed within four years.[19]

Race/Ethnicity. It is well-documented that graduation rates are lower for minority students and time-to-degree is longer.[20] However, as California State University and the National Institute on Higher Education policy finds, often race differences are accompanied by differences in socioeconomic status and academic preparation, and when these differences are controlled, minority students do as well as their majority counterparts.

Stopping Out. Stopping out, or taking time off from school, is not an uncommon occurrence among undergraduates. One study estimates that native students, or students who graduate from their original institution, who stop out take on average two-thirds of a year longer to graduate than those who do not stop out.[21]

Student Attitudes/Values. Some have suggested that changing student attitudes and values toward education may impact baccalaureate degree completion rates.[22] Some attitudinal changes cited are reduced student motivation levels and increased student interest in taking extra courses not required for graduation. A California survey found that, while taking extra courses was cited by students as the number one reason for increased time-to-degree, there was no significant difference between the number of credits accumulated by students who completed their degrees within four years and those who took longer.[23]

Transferring. Loss of credit upon transfer from one institution to another can negatively impact time-to-degree. Upper division transfer students were found to take an additional 3.5 years beyond their prior education experience to complete their baccalaureate degree.[24] Although national transfer rates currently range from 20.0 to 22.1 percent, some states have estimated as much as 66 percent of their students take at least one course at another institution.[25]

Work. Work can negatively impact time-to-degree because it takes time directly away from classes and study. In a national survey, approximately 63 percent of 1995 first-time full time freshmen indicated that they worked for pay at least six hours a week.[26] With such a large proportion of students working, the potential for a negative impact of work on time-to-degree is great.

Independent versus Public Institution. Lastly, National Center for Education Statistics data indicates that a higher proportion of 1990 graduates from independent institutions completed their baccalaureate degree within four years than those at public institutions.[27] While independent institutions seem to have a better track record at graduating students within

four years, public institutions appear to have more students persisting longer to acquire their baccalaureate degree. It is not clear how much of these differences may be attributed to the different types of programs offered, costs of attendance, or student demographics.

Issues to Consider When Evaluating Time-to-Degree

Time-to-baccalaureate-degree completion is a complex issue. While time-to-degree data can be a useful evaluative measure, and is as of July 1, 1993, a federal requirement, it does have its limitations. Time-to-degree is a narrow measure of educational outcomes that cannot capture the many significant differences among states and institutions. At the state and institutional level, different missions and educational goals exist. For instance, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education has assigned each institutional type a specializing role within the State System in order "that all qualified individuals may be accommodated at some institution..."[28] With these different roles come varied admissions policies and four-year baccalaureate degree completion rates.

As previously mentioned, Alexander Astin of the American Council on Education warns that too much focus on time-to-degree can discourage institutions from recruiting and admitting poor and minority students who have been shown to take longer to complete baccalaureate degrees.[29] Both Astin and the Institute for Higher Education Policy stress the importance of student persistence as opposed to time-to-degree. They both discuss how minorities generally show lower than average four-year baccalaureate degree completion rates, but when family income and academic preparation are considered, the students tended to have higher than average levels of persistence. Another example is that of male students who were shown in national data to complete baccalaureate degrees in a lower proportion than female students within the first four years. However, beyond the fourth year, male students appear to close the graduation gap with females, by completing their baccalaureate degrees in greater proportion.[30] Therefore, time-to-degree may not be the single most appropriate measure for evaluating the educational outcomes.

These differences in four-year baccalaureate degree completion rates and persistence to a baccalaureate degree only emphasize the importance of carefully defining what "success" means in higher education and carefully choosing the appropriate measures for it. The Institute of Higher Education Policy suggests that any measure of success should demonstrate that students have not only had access to postsecondary opportunities but have continued on in school or have completed a degree or an educational career goal.[31]

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This study analyzes State System students' time-to-degree. First, the study compares the SAB survey data on freshmen time-to-degree expectations to actual 1988 UDS freshmen time-to-degree cohort data. Secondly, the study highlights some interesting student expectations compared to actual student data results that did not have direct comparisons with one another.

The Data

Student Advisory Board 1995 Freshmen Survey Data

The Student Advisory Board (SAB) database is comprised of the information received from 3,760 students opinion surveys. The SAB data is in gross cohort format, meaning that all of the freshmen surveyed, regardless of how many credits, if any, they completed, were included in the survey. Of those surveyed, a subset of 1,399 State System freshmen were analyzed for the purposes of this study. Only in the analysis by type of institution were the 61 freshmen students from independent institutions included in the analysis. The SAB survey data represents the time-to-degree expectations of the survey respondents.

Unitized Data System 1988 Entering Freshmen Cohort Data

The UDS 1988 entering freshmen cohort data is also in a gross cohort format that consists of the entire freshmen student population (37,059 students) who entered State System institutions in 1988, regardless of how many credits, if any, they completed. While the usage of a gross cohort is consistent with the student body in the SAB survey, the cohort is significantly larger than a cohort created by "Student Right to Know" or NCAA type criteria used in the previously reported studies. Because only seven years of data were available, only those students who had graduated within the seven years were included in the specified time periods. This data was used to calculate the actual student graduation rates.

Study Limitations

While the SAB survey was not a random sampling, efforts were made to make it as representative of the student population as possible. It is appropriate to note that the summary only speaks to the expectations of the respondents or students from State System institutions and selected private/independent institutions who were involved in the survey.

The SAB received over half (3,726) of the originally distributed 7,190 surveys for an overall response rate of approximately 52 percent. Table 4 shows various similarities between the SAB survey respondents and the 1980 cohort. Most of the freshmen in both databases were Caucasian females under age 22 who attended two-year colleges.

Much of the analysis in this report is of a comparative nature. Limitations exist when comparing the results of two or more databases and/or studies. Often different researchers collect, tabulate, and analyze data in ways that meet their particular needs. For the purposes of comparison, the data for the analyses in this study was made as reasonably consistent as possible.

TABLE 4
STATE SYSTEM COMPARISON
OF 1995 FRESHMEN SAB SURVEY DATA
AND THE 1988 UDS ENTERING FRESHMEN COHORT DATA

Student Characteristics	1995 SAB Survey Data[33] N=1,399	1988 UDS Cohort Data N=37,059
Age		
Under age 22	74.5%	62.2%
Age 22 or older	20.4%	37.8%
Race-Ethnicity		
African-American	12.1%	6.9%
Native American	8.1%	5.8%
Hispanic	2.7%	1.6%
Caucasian	68.0%	83.2%
Asian American	1.9%	1.3%
Other[33]	2.8%	-
Nonresident Alien[34]		1.2%
Gender		
Female	55.1%	55.7%
Male	40.6%	41.9%
Types of Public Institution		
Comprehensive	17.8%	-
Four-Year	20.3%	-
Comp. & Four-Year	38.1%	38.6%
Public Two-Year	57.7%	61.4%

Source: 1995 Student Advisory Board Degree Completion Freshmen Survey and the Unitized Data System 1988 Entering Freshmen Cohort.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This portion of the report will compare State System students' time to baccalaureate degree expectations and actual data. The 1995 SAB survey data represents the freshmen respondents' time-to-degree expectations, while the 1988 UDS cohort data represents actual student time-to-degree.

General Analysis

The literature points out that while the general expectation is that a baccalaureate degree can be completed within four years, fewer students are graduating within that time.

Expected Time-to-Degree

The majority (52.4 percent) of the State System students surveyed expected to complete baccalaureate degrees in four or fewer years. Almost one-third (30 percent) expected to take between four and six years, while only 5.4 percent expected to take six or more years to graduate. (See Table 5.)

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Actual Time-to-Degree

Actual 1988 cohort data indicates that only 4.5 percent of all students completed their baccalaureate degrees within four years. Most of the State System graduates completed their degrees between years four and six (7.5 percent). Almost six percent (5.6 percent) completed their degrees in six or more years. (See Table 5.)

Comparison of Expected and Actual Time-to-Degree

As Figure 1 shows, about 92 percent of the SAB survey respondents from two-year and baccalaureate degree granting institutions indicated that they expected to earn a baccalaureate degree. However, the actual average annual graduation rate from year four to year seven for the 1988 cohort is only 4.4 percent. At that rate, it would take the 1988 cohort approximately 25 years for 92 percent to complete their baccalaureate degrees. Whatever the case, the data indicates that it is unlikely that the proportion of students surveyed will complete degrees as soon as they expect.

TABLE 5
STATE SYSTEM COMPARISON OF
EXPECTED AND ACTUAL STUDENT
BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION RATES

Time-to-Degree by Student Data Type	Number	Percent	Time to Baccalaureate Degree			
			4 yrs. or less	<6 yrs.	6 or more yrs.	No opinion**
SAB Survey Data	1,399	100%				
Expected Graduates	1,282	91.6%	54.6%	85.9%	91.6%	8.4%
1988 UDS Cohort Data[25]	37,059	100%				
Actual Graduates	6,539	17.6%	4.5%	12.0%	17.6%	-

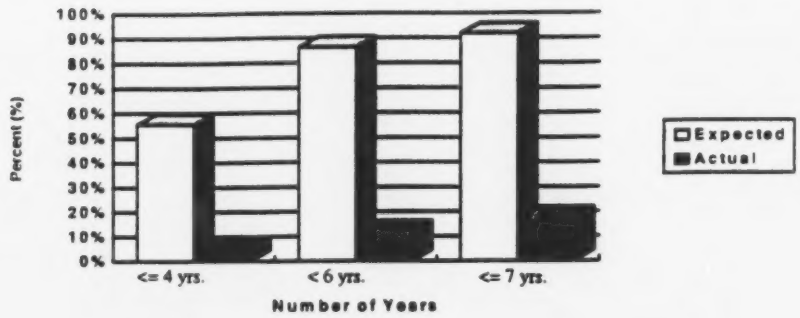
Source: 1995 Student Advisory Board Degree Completion Freshmen Surveys and the 1988 UDS Entering Freshmen Cohort Data.

*The UDS data only includes actual graduation rates through year seven.

**Includes both students who answered "no opinion" and those who did not respond to the question.

FIGURE 1.

Cumulative State System Student Baccalaureate Degree Completion Rates (Expected v/s Actual)



Source: 1995 Student Advisory Board Degree Completion Freshmen Surveys and the Unitized Data System 1988 Entering Freshmen Cohort. Figure includes cumulative expected and actual graduation rates.

Analysis by Age

Older students (students age 22 and older) are part of the growing nontraditional segment of college and university students who, because of work, family, and/or other obligations, often take longer to complete their baccalaureate degrees than younger students (students age 21 and younger). This section looks at the the impact of age on time-to-degree.

Expected Time-to-Degree

On average, younger students expected to complete their baccalaureate degrees faster than older students. About 57.2 percent of the younger students and 35.9 percent of the older students expected to complete their baccalaureate degrees within four years. Furthermore, older students were over four times more likely than younger students to expect to take between six or more years to complete their baccalaureate degrees (older students - 13.4 percent, younger students - 3.1 percent). It is interesting to note that the older students surveyed were over twice as likely to have no opinion or answer to the question. (See Table 6.)

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TABLE 6
STATE SYSTEM RESPONDENTS'
EXPECTED BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION RATES
BY AGE

	SAB Respondents		Proportion Expecting Degree			
Age of SAB Respondents	Number	Percent	4 yrs. or less	>4 & <6 yrs.	6 yrs. or more	No opinion*
Younger students (<=21 yrs.)	1,088	74.5%	57.2%	30.3%	3.1%	6.0%
Older students (>=22 yrs.)	298	20.4%	35.9%	29.1%	13.4%	14.7%
No age given	13	0.9%	42.9%	28.6%	7.1%	14.3%
Total Freshmen Respondents	1,399	100%	52.4%	30.0%	5.4%	8.0%

Source: 1995 Student Advisory Board Degree Completion Freshmen Surveys.
*Includes both students who answered "no opinion" and those who did not respond to the question.

Actual Time-to-Degree

A substantial disparity exists between the actual graduation rates of younger and older students in every designated time period. While the graduation rate for older students remains fairly level (between 1.3 and 1.9 percent in the designated time periods), for younger students, the graduation rate peaks at 11 percent between years four and six. Within the first four years, younger students graduated at a rate that was five times that of older students (younger students -- 6.5 percent, older students -- 1.3 percent). (See Table 7.)

TABLE 7
STATE SYSTEM STUDENTS'
ACTUAL BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION RATES
BY AGE

	1988 Freshmen Cohort		Proportion Completing Degree			
Age of Student	Number	Percent	4 yrs. or less	>4 & <6 yrs.	yrs. 6 & 7	Row Totals
Younger students (<=21 yrs.)	23,069	62.2%	6.5%	11.1%	8.0%	25.6%
Older students (>=22 yrs.)	13,990	37.8%	1.3%	1.4%	1.9%	4.6%
Total	37,059	100%	4.5%	7.4%	5.7%	17.6%

Source: The Unitized Data System 1988 Entering Freshmen Cohort

Comparison of Expected and Actual Time-to-Degree

The rate of baccalaureate degree completion for both the younger and older students in the SAB survey greatly exceeded what each group is likely to achieve. However, the actual four-year graduation rates for older students can be expected to be as low as one-fifth of that for their younger counterparts (older students -- 1.3 percent, younger students -- 6.5 percent).

Therefore, while the degree-seeking goals of the older students surveyed resemble those of the younger students, the balancing of multiple priorities (i.e. work and family) may force

older students to take substantially longer than younger students to complete their baccalaureate degrees.

Analysis by Race

Race was shown to be an important factor in time-to-degree. The Illinois study found time-to-degree for minorities to be longer than that of other racial/ethnic groups. As in the Illinois study, this analysis looked at racial/ethnic differences in both expected and actual time-to-degree.

Expected Time-to-Degree

The racial/ethnic groups with the highest proportion of students expecting to complete baccalaureate degrees within four years were Hispanics (60 percent) and students who classified themselves as "Other" (59 percent). The racial/ethnic groups with the lowest proportion of students expecting to complete baccalaureate degrees within four years were Asian Americans[36] (44 percent) and Native Americans (52.4 percent). (See Table 8.)

TABLE 8
STATE SYSTEM RESPONDENTS'
EXPECTED BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION RATES
BY RACE

	SAB Respondents		Proportion Expecting Degree			
Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent	4 yrs. or less	>4 & < 6 yrs.	6 or more yrs.	No opinion*
African-American	176	12.1%	53.1%	35.6%	5.1%	5.6%
Native American	118	8.1%	52.6%	21.1%	3.0%	12.0%
Hispanic**	40	2.7%	60.0%	27.5%	7.5%	5.0%
Caucasian	993	68.0%	51.9%	30.3%	5.5%	8.2%
Asian	27	1.9%	44.4%	44.4%	7.4%	3.7%
Other	42	2.9%	59.1%	22.7%	9.1%	4.6%
TOTAL	1,399	100%	52.4%	30.0%	5.4%	8.0%

Source: Student Advisory Board 1995 Freshmen Degree Completion Surveys
*Includes both students who answered "no opinion" and those who did not respond to the question
**Includes Hispanic, Chicano, Latinos, etc.

Actual Time-to-Degree

The racial/ethnic groups with the highest proportion of students actually completing baccalaureate degrees within four years were Non-Resident Aliens (9 percent) and Asian Americans (6 percent). The racial/ethnic groups with the lowest proportion of students completing baccalaureate degrees within four years were African-Americans and Hispanics (each with only 2 percent). (See Table 9.)

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TABLE 9
STATE SYSTEM STUDENTS'
ACTUAL BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION RATES
BY RACE

	1988 FreshmanCohort		Proportion Completing Degree			
Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent	< 4 yrs.	>4 & <6 yrs.	yrs. 6 & 7	Row Totals
African-American	2,560	6.9%	2.1%	6.1%	4.6%	12.8%
Native American*	2,157	5.8%	3.2%	5.1%	4.7%	13.0%
Hispanic	586	1.6%	2.0%	5.3%	5.8%	13.1%
Caucasian	30,836	83.2%	4.8%	7.7%	5.8%	18.3%
Asian American	487	1.3%	5.5%	8.0%	7.8%	21.4%
Non-Resident Aliens	433	1.2%	9.0%	7.2%	5.8%	21.9%
TOTAL	37,059	100%	4.5%	7.4%	5.7%	17.6%

Source: Unitized Data System 1988 Entering Freshmen Cohort.
*Includes Alaskans

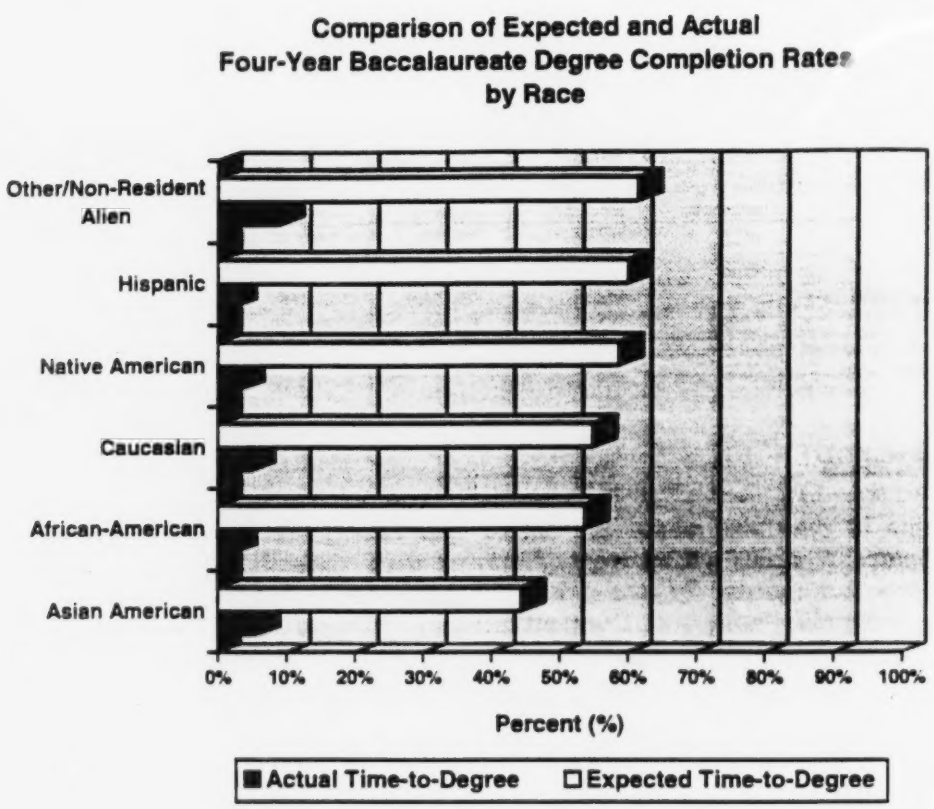
Comparison of Time-to-Degree

Generally speaking, all racial/ethnic groups surveyed expected to graduate at far higher rates than they actually achieved. Differences between expectations and actuality were most dramatic among Hispanics and Asians. With the exception of Nonresident Aliens, Hispanic students surveyed had a higher proportion of students expecting to graduate within four years (60.0 percent) than students of any other racial/ethnic group; however, their actual four-year graduation rate was the lowest (2.0 percent). In contrast, Asians who had the lowest four-year graduation expectations of all the racial/ethnic groups surveyed (44.4 percent) were second only to Non-Resident Aliens in their actual four-year degree completion rate (5.5 percent).

Similar to the Illinois state system study, African-Americans and Hispanics in the Oklahoma State System, had longer than average time-to-degree. However, unlike in the Illinois study, Hispanics in Oklahoma took longer than African-Americans.

While race appears to have a direct impact on time-to-degree, Astin suggests its impact to be indirect. The direct impact on time-to-degree, according to Astin, comes from the student's socioeconomic status that is usually stratified along racial lines.[37] The Institute for Higher Education Policy notes that lower socioeconomic status usually means lower quality schools, resulting in poor academically prepared students.[38] Astin's research showed that when socioeconomic status and academic preparation are controlled, racial differences in time-to-degree vanish.

FIGURE 2.



Source: Student Advisory Board 1995 Degree Completion Freshmen Surveys and the Unitized Data System 1988 Entering Freshmen Cohort

Analysis by Gender

Gender differences in baccalaureate degree completion is a well documented phenomenon. Findings from other studies indicate that females exceed males in four-year degree completion rates. This section explores gender to see if Oklahoma students exhibit similar gender differences in time-to-degree.

Expected Time-to-Degree

Although more of the males surveyed (93.8 percent) than females (90.7 percent) indicated a desire to complete their baccalaureate degrees, a slightly larger proportion of females (52.8 percent) than males (51.7 percent) surveyed expected to have that degree by the end of their fourth academic year. (See Table 10.)

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TABLE 10
STATE SYSTEM RESPONDENTS'
EXPECTED BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION RATES
BY GENDER

Respondents' Gender	SAB Respondents		Proportion Expecting Degree			
	Number	Percent	<4 yrs.	>4 & < 6 yrs.	6 or more yrs.	No opinion*
Males	611	40.6%	51.7%	34.7%	4.4%	6.2%
Females	848	55.1%	52.8%	26.7%	6.1%	9.3%
Gender not provided	1	0.1%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
TOTAL	1,399	100%	52.4%	30.0%	5.4%	8.0%

Source: Student Advisory Board 1995 Degree Completion Freshmen Surveys
*Includes both students who answered "no opinion" and those who did not respond to the question.

Actual Time-to-Degree

Female students in the 1988 cohort had higher four-year graduation rates than males (females -- 5.5 percent , males -- 3.3 percent). However, male students began to close the rate gap between years four and six. By year seven, the cumulative graduation rate for males had surpassed that of females (males -- 21.1 percent, females -- 17.6 percent). (See Table 11.)

TABLE 11
STATE SYSTEM STUDENT
ACTUAL BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION RATES
BY GENDER

Students' Gender	1988 Freshmen Cohort		Proportion Completing Degree			
	Number	Percent	4 yrs. or less	>4 & <6 yrs.	yrs. 6 & 7	Row Totals
Males	16,429	41.9%	3.3%	7.9%	9.9%	21.1%
Females	20,630	58.1%	5.5%	7.1%	5.0%	17.6%
TOTAL	37,059	100%	4.5%	7.4%	5.7%	17.6%

Source: The Unitized Data System 1988 Entering Freshmen Cohort Data

Comparison of Expected and Actual Time-to-Degree

Both female and male students surveyed expected to complete their baccalaureate degrees at substantially faster rates than they actually achieved. A higher proportion of females expected to complete their baccalaureate degree within four years. (See Table 11.) More males, however expected to eventually complete a baccalaureate degree. By year seven, actual data indicates that male students have not only closed the initial four-year graduation gap but have surpassed the graduation rate of females. (See Table 12.)

TABLE 12
LONG-TERM STATE SYSTEM STUDENT
BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION RATES
BY GENDER
(EXPECTED V/S/ ACTUAL)

Students' Gender	Baccalaureate Degree Completion	
	Expecting Degree (Any Year)	Actually Completing Degrees (by year 7)
Males	90.8%	21.1%
Females	85.6%	17.6%
TOTAL	92.0%	17.6%

Source: The 1995 Student Advisory Board Degree Completion Freshmen Surveys and the Unitized Data System 1988 Entering Freshmen Cohort Data

Analysis by Type of Institution

In Oklahoma, as in the rest of the nation, different colleges and universities have different missions, and with these missions come different admissions criteria, curriculum offerings, etc., each of which can impact the rates of baccalaureate degree completion for their respective student bodies. This section attempts to explore these potential differences in expected and actual time-to-baccalaureate degree of students from two-year and baccalaureate-degree granting institutions. A special look at the expectations of students from independent institutions is included in this section.

Expected Time-to-Degree

A smaller proportion of students surveyed from two-year colleges than those at baccalaureate degree granting institutions indicated an interest in eventually completing a baccalaureate degree (two-year students -- 88.3 percent, four-year and comprehensive institutions -- 96.8 percent). Two-year students surveyed were also less likely than four-year and comprehensive students to expect to complete their baccalaureate degree in four years (two-year students -- 50.4 percent, four-year and comprehensive students -- 61.1 percent). Even so, the expectations of the two-year students surveyed were high. It is appropriate to note that younger students were overrepresented among the two-year student population.

The longer time-to-degree expectations of the students attending two-year colleges may result from the larger population of older students attending these schools or student concern about financing the cost of education at the more expensive baccalaureate degree granting institutions. Older students and students choosing two-year colleges for largely financial reasons would be more likely to be working to help mediate educational costs. As expected, the 1995 SAB survey data revealed that a higher proportion students surveyed from two-year colleges worked in the fall and/or spring semesters than students surveyed from four-year and comprehensive institutions. (See Table 13 and the section entitled "Work.")

colleges worked in the fall and/or spring semesters than students surveyed from four-year and comprehensive institutions. (See Table 13 and the section entitled "Work.")

Expectations for baccalaureate degree completion within four years were higher for freshmen surveyed at independent institutions (68.9 percent) than those surveyed at public institutions (52.4 percent).

TABLE 13
STATE SYSTEM RESPONDENTS'
EXPECTED BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION
BY TYPE OF INSTITUTION

Type of Institution Attended	Freshman Respondents		Proportion Expecting Degree			
	Number	Percent	4 yrs. or less	>4 & <6 yrs.	6 or more yrs.	No opinion*
Public:						
Comprehensive	260	17.8%	62.7%	33.5%	0.4%	3.5%
Four-Year	296	20.3%	60.0%	34.5%	2.7%	3.0%
Two-Year	843	57.7%	50.4%	29.5%	8.3%	11.7%
Total Public	1,399	95.8%	52.4%	30.0%	5.4%	8.0%
Total Independent	61	4.2%	68.9%	24.6%	1.6%	4.9%
TOTAL PUBLIC & INDEPENDENT	1,460	100%	55.3%	31.0%	5.5%	8.2%

Source: Student Advisory Board 1995 Degree Completion Freshmen Surveys
*Includes both students who answered "no opinion" and those who did not respond to the question.

While some students at two-year colleges may consider an associate degree a terminal degree, most two-year students in the SAB survey planned on earning a baccalaureate degree.

TABLE 14
STATE SYSTEM STUDENTS'
ACTUAL BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION RATES
BY TYPE OF INSTITUTION

Public Institution Tier	1988 Freshmen Cohort		Proportion Completing Degree			
	Number	Percent	4 yrs. or less	>4 & <6 yrs.	yrs. 6 & 7	Row Totals
Four-Year & Comprehensive	14,305	38.6%	9.4%	14.7%	9.5%	33.5%
Two-Year	22,754	61.4%	1.5%	2.9%	3.3%	7.7%
TOTAL	37,059	100%	4.5%	7.4%	5.7%	17.6%

Source: The Unitized Data System 1988 Entering Freshmen Cohort Data.

Actual Time-to-Degree

Students attending four-year and comprehensive institutions graduated faster than those attending two-year institutions. By year seven, students attending four-year and comprehensive institutions had a cumulative graduation rate of 36 percent, a rate over four times that of students who began their postsecondary education at two-year colleges (7.7 percent. (See Table 14.)

Comparison of Expected and Actual Time-to-Degree

Both students from two-year and baccalaureate degree granting institutions had expectations of four-year baccalaureate degree completion rates (50.4 and 62.7 percent, respectively) that exceeded the actual rates (1.5 and 9.4 percent, respectively). Of particular interest were the results showing that over half of the students from two-year colleges expected to complete a baccalaureate degree within four years. The survey question clearly inquired about student time to baccalaureate degree. The results resemble those from the ACE, which in a similar study found that most first-time, full-time freshmen attending both two- and four-year institutions planned on acquiring at least a baccalaureate degree (93 percent).[9]

Other Factors of Interest from the 1995 SAB Survey Data

Work

As the cost of education continues to outpace inflation and wage growth, parents and students alike face larger shortfalls between the cost of education and what they can afford to pay. Students are making up this financial shortfall by taking out more loans and working. This section explores the impact of work on students' expectations of time-to-degree.

TABLE 15
STATE SYSTEM RESPONDENTS'
EXPECTED BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION
BY WORKING STATUS

	Freshmen Respondents		Percent Expecting Degree			
Working Status	Number	Percent	4 yrs. or less	>4 & < 6 yrs.	6 or more yrs.	No opinion*
Working	751	51.4%	48.9%	31.9%	7.2%	8.1%
Non-working	590	40.4%	57.5%	27.6%	2.9%	7.3%
No job status provided	58	4.0%	45.8%	28.8%	8.5%	15.3%
TOTAL	1,399	100%	52.4%	30.0%	5.4%	8.0%

Source: The Student Advisory Board 1995 Freshmen Degree Completion Surveys
*Includes both students who answered "no opinion" and those who did not respond to the question.

As work competes directly with school for time, it was no surprise to find that the working students in the 1995 survey expected to take longer to complete their baccalaureate degrees than the non-working students. (See Table 15.) Less than half (48.9 percent) of working

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students expected to complete their baccalaureate degree within four years while over 57.5 percent of non-working students expected to do so. Working students were over three times as likely to expect to take six or more years to complete their degree than non-working students (working -- 7.2 percent, non-working -- 2.9 percent).

Advanced Placement (AP) Courses*

Students with good academic preparation were noted in many reports as being more likely to succeed in college and complete their baccalaureate degrees within four years. This kind of student is represented in the SAB survey as those who enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP), or college preparatory, courses at their respective high schools. AP students in the survey were more likely to expect to complete their baccalaureate degrees within four years than non-AP students (AP students -- 60.7 percent, non-AP-students -- 51.7 percent). (See Table 16.)

TABLE 16
STATE SYSTEM RESPONDENTS'
EXPECTED BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION
BY ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) COURSE HISTORY

Advanced Placement Activity	Freshmen Respondents		Percent Expecting Degree			
	Number	Percent	4 yrs. or less	>4 & < 6 yrs.	6 or more yrs.	No opinion*
AP Students	175	12.0%	60.6%	25.7%	3.8%	5.5%
Non-AP Students	1154	79.1%	51.7%	30.6%	5.5%	8.0%
No Answer	70	4.8%	43.7%	31.0%	5.5%	8.0%
TOTAL	1,399	100%	52.4%	30.0%	5.4%	8.0%

Source: Student Advisory Board 1995 Freshmen Degree Completion Surveys
*Includes both students who answered "no opinion" and those who did not respond to the question

College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)** "

The College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) is a program of examinations in undergraduate courses that provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate college-level achievement, thus exempting themselves from taking certain courses and possibly reducing their time-to-degree.

Students surveyed who took the CLEP exam were about five percent more likely than non-CLEP students to expect to graduate within four years (CLEP students -- 57.5 percent, Non-CLEP students -- 52.4 percent). Non-CLEP students expected to make up the gap in graduation rates between years four and six. (See Table 17.)

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* Advanced Placement® is a registered trademark of The College Board.
" The College-Level Examination Program® (CLEP) is a registered trademark of The College Board.

TABLE 17
STATE SYSTEM RESPONDENTS'
EXPECTED BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION
BY CLEP TEST ACTIVITY

CLEP Test Activity	Freshmen Respondents		Percent Expecting Degree			
	Number	Percent	4 yrs. or less	>4 & < 6 yrs.	6 or more yrs.	No opinion*
CLEP test takers	249	17.1%	57.4%	25.3%	5.4%	7.3%
Non-CLEP test takers	1,077	73.7%	52.4%	30.9%	5.3%	7.3%
No response	73	5.0%	35.5%	32.9%	6.6%	21.1%
TOTAL	1,399	100%	52.4%	30.0%	5.4%	8.0%

Source: Student Advisory Board 1995 Freshmen Degree Completion Surveys.
*Includes both students who answered "no opinion" and those who did not respond to the question.

Other Factors of Interest from the 1988 UDS Cohort Data

This section reviews factors in the 1988 cohort data for their impact on actual student time-to-degree expectations.

Course Load

As discussed earlier, a student's course load directly impacts his/her time-to-degree. As Garcia (California State University) points out, some students do not seem to realize that taking 12 credit hours per semester stretches out a student's time-to-degree from four to six years.

TABLE 18
STATE SYSTEM STUDENTS'
ACTUAL BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION
BY COURSE LOAD

Course Load	Freshmen		Percent Completing Degree			
	Number	Percent	4 yrs. or less	>4 & < 6 yrs.	yrs. 6 & 7	Row Totals
Full-time*	19,941	53.8%	7.3%	12.2%	8.4%	27.9%
Part-time**	17,118	46.2%	1.3%	1.9%	2.5%	5.7%
TOTAL	37,059	100%	4.5%	7.5%	5.7%	17.6%

Source: Unitized Data System 1988 Entering Freshmen Cohort
*Full-time students were students who took 12 or more credit hours per semester.
**Part-time-students were students who took less than 12 credits per semester.

Several interesting patterns emerged upon analysis of this factor. First, most of the students were enrolled full-time (53.8 percent). Second, the vast majority of full-time students were younger students (62.2 percent) and were attending baccalaureate degree granting

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institutions (73.0 percent). Third, older students were more likely to attend school part time (64.3 percent). Finally, most of the students at two-year colleges (64.4 percent) were part-time students. (See Table 18.)

As they expected, full-time students were shown to complete their baccalaureate degrees faster than part-time students. Within the first four years, 7.3 percent of the freshmen who entered as full-time students and only 1.3 percent of the freshmen who entered as part-time students in 1988 completed their baccalaureate degrees.

Transfer

The act of transferring from a baccalaureate degree granting institution to another higher education institution was shown to have a generally negative impact on time-to-degree.[40] Of the students who received baccalaureate degrees within four years, almost three out of four (73.9 percent) were students with no transfer activity and just over one-fourth (26.1 percent) were transfer students.

TABLE 19
STATE SYSTEM GRADUATES'
ACTUAL BACCALAUREATE DEGREE COMPLETION
BY TRANSFER ACTIVITY

	Freshmen		Proportion of Graduates Completing Degree			
Transfer Activity	Number	Percent	4 yrs. or less	>4 & < 6 yrs.	yrs. 6 & 7	Overall Percent 7 yrs. or less
Non-Transfers	4,242	11.4%	73.9%	67.7%	53.9%	64.9%
Transfers	2,297	6.2%	26.1%	32.3%	46.1%	35.1%
TOTAL	6,539	100%	25.7%	42.1%	32.2%	100%

Source Unitized Data System 1988 Entering Freshmen Cohort

Between years four and seven, transfer students began to close the graduation gap; however, by year seven, 64.9 percent of the graduates remained non-transfer students, and transfer students only comprised 35.1 percent of the graduates. (See Table 19.)

Factors That Can Negatively Impact Time-to-Degree Not Examined by This Study

The study attempted to use the SAB survey and State Regents' UDS cohort reports to address the factors mentioned in other time-to-degree studies; however, several factors were not able to be addressed. This was due to the design of the survey, the UDS database, or the UDS cohort reports. Those items not able to be adequately considered are presented below.

Changing Majors

Attempts were made to examine the effect of "changing majors" on the actual time-to-degree within the 1988 UDS gross cohort. The elements necessary to adequately track such behavior were not available in the cohort programming. It is recommended that a specific study with an appropriate design be made on the impact of changing majors on time-to-degree.

Extracurricular Activities

The databases for the survey were inadequate to address extracurricular activities. Perhaps a pilot study using post-graduation data should be run in order to ascertain the importance of this issue and whether or not such data should be included in future surveys or the UDS data.

Financial Aid

The impact of financial aid was partially addressed in the SAB survey section on work. The actual effect of the work and other financial aid was not able to be addressed within the current structure of the Unitized Data System. Any future survey instruments should be capable of addressing this issue in depth, and the structure of the UDS data should be enhanced to allow examination of financial aid.

Remediation

Although remediation is an important factor in time-to-degree, sufficient data was not available within the 1988 cohort to adequately assess the impact of remediation on student time-to-degree.

TIME-TO-DEGREE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OTHER STUDIES

State Recommendations

The Illinois Board of Higher Education at the conclusion of its study reinforced the policy priorities to improve student access, choice, preparation for college level work, and undergraduate academic experience. Some specific recommendations included an evaluation that thoroughly reviewed graduation requirements, course schedules, and academic support programs and the effects they have on student retention and time to graduation. Improved and updated information systems are also expected to provide better student monitoring to address questions about high school preparation, student effort and achievement, and institutional commitment.[41]

The study by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education led to the following recommendations: (1) Increasing the institutional accountability by requiring two-year

and four-year institutions to include in their accountability reports to the commission a survey of undergraduate students who have stopped-out or dropped-out to determine whether institutional policies or practices can be improved; (2) Examination of current academic advising programs of excessive credit-hour requirements [128 semester hours for a bachelor's and all associate's programs that require more than 64 hours]; (3) A re-examination by institutions and governing boards of how telecommunications could be used to deliver courses through alternative methods to increase access to students; and (4) A review by governing boards of faculty reward policies to determine how student advising and participation in technology-based courses can be incorporated into the reward system.[42]

Finally, the commission recommended the review of proposals to reduce the four-year degree, such as usage of advanced placement credit, credit for prior learning, increased opportunity to test-out, and elimination of duplication between the last year of high school and the first year of college. The commission noted that the bachelor's degree could be reduced if courses could be made more comprehensive and a more prescriptive degree program with fewer electives.

In a follow-up report (January 1994), the Commission on Higher Education added the recommendation of creating stronger linkages, and innovation and encouraging students to complete their secondary education.[43]

Institutional Recommendations

One of the most extensive studies on time-to-degree was performed by Philip Garcia at California State University (1994). In his assessment of time-to-degree, Garcia found the primary cause for increased time-to-degree was students stopping-out or taking time off (29.4 percent of transfers and 67.8 percent of freshmen took at least one term off).[44]

One of Garcia's recommendations was that campus policies be more accommodating for part-time attendance. For example, part-time students pay lower fees, class schedules include a significant number of night classes, and there be no limits to the number of years in undergraduate school. For future study, he emphasized the need to look at measures of academic preparation, unit requirements for individual majors, unmet financial need, and the desire to work while attending college.

Under the mandate of the Student Affirmative Action (SAA) five-year plans, the University of California at Davis (UC Davis) proposes to increase the retention and graduation rates of SAA undergraduates. The plan also requires that each campus successfully retain and graduate SAA students at a rate equal to other students.

While the UC Davis study notes low graduation rates among certain ethnic groups, it states that, when such characteristics as academic preparation and socioeconomic status have been controlled for, differences among ethnic and racial groups in education vanish or appear to be reversed, indicating possible indirect effects of race or ethnicity on educational outcomes.

The report concludes that academic preparation for college-level work appears to be a critical factor leading to acquisition of a bachelor's degree. Citing Tinto's 1987 report, the document finds that institutions should at least ensure that new students either enter with or have the opportunity to acquire sufficient knowledge to meet the academic demands of institutions of higher learning. Suggestions such as increasing student campus support for academics and early outreach to secondary school outreach are made. The study also notes that while there is little that higher education can do to change pre-existing conditions such as parental education and socioeconomic background, they do recommend increased sensitivity to the special needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In his study, William Knight (June 1994) attempted to predict and explain time-to-degree to construct a tentative causal model of time-to-degree attainment utilizing enrollment data available to institutional researchers. The results of Knight's study showed that the cumulative credits earned, freshman year GPA, SAT scores, number of courses dropped, high school GPA, and age at matriculation had the greatest explanatory value. In sum, enrollment and academic ability were the best predictors of time-to-degree. Knight recommended that stricter admissions requirements, limiting course dropping, exploring reasons for and possible limiting total credit hours received will decrease time-to-degree.[45]

TIME-TO-DEGREE COMPLETION
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed not only to identify the possible contributing factors to time-to-degree, but also to assess the appropriateness of time-to-degree as a measure of student success. Many variables were identified that impact time-to-degree, including: academic preparation, changing majors, student expectations of time-to-degree, extracurricular activities, financial need, gender, institutional policies, race/ethnicity, and transferring, to name a few. As a result of its study, COSA makes the following recommendations:

- From the analysis, COSA concludes that time-to-degree is a narrow measure that fails to capture the multitude of special needs of the individual student and the varied student populations. While a useful measure for a general assessment of student degree completion, and a federal reporting requirement, COSA recommends that the focus of future study be shifted from students' time-to-degree to students' persistence to a degree.

- Nontraditional students age 22 and older, at the time of matriculation, make up an increasing share of the entering freshmen student population at Oklahoma colleges and universities. Given the importance of the appropriate support systems to enhance the success of these students, COSA recommends an in-depth assessment to determine their unique needs and how well those needs are currently addressed by institutions within the State System.

- Researchers have found racial-ethnic differences in time-to-degree to result primarily from racial stratification in academic preparation and socioeconomic status. While these factors are largely predetermined (or determined prior to entry into higher education),

COSA recommends that the State Regents help to lessen their impact through increased coordinating efforts with primary and secondary educators and administrators to better prepare students for entry into postsecondary education. COSA also urges institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of their specific policies and procedures relating to cultural diversity.

- Students who enter higher education at two-year colleges not only take longer than those entering baccalaureate degree institutions to graduate, but also graduate in smaller proportions. It is not clear, however, how much of this difference is attributable to different educational and/or career objectives of two- year students. COSA recommends a further study of two-year college students to ascertain their educational objectives as compared to students entering baccalaureate degree granting institutions.

- COSA recognizes that (1) the type of education a student receives should match that student's particular educational interests, abilities, and career goals; and (2) it is not every student's intent to complete a baccalaureate degree. COSA encourages more dialogue regarding the important roles that personal and career enhancing educational activities play in the cultural and economic development of communities throughout Oklahoma.

- Concerns have been expressed that students taking courses in excess of those required for baccalaureate degree completion negatively impacts time-to-degree. COSA recommends that this and the following additional factors which may negatively impact time-to-degree be studied further from an academic policy perspective: student transfer, small course loads, and changing majors. Similarly, COSA recommends that the following factors be further studied from the student services perspective: academic advising, extracurricular activities, work, and financial aid.

- Programs like the Advanced Placement (AP) and College-Level Examination Programs (CLEP) offer real opportunities for students to reduce their time-to-degree by entering college with advanced standing. One of several important benefits derived from taking AP course(s) is that it provides high school students with a realistic introduction to the expectations and demands of college-level courses. Secondly, students surveyed who completed AP courses in high school and the CLEP test prior to college had generally nigher expected four-year rates of baccalaureate degree completion than students who did not participate in either program. Therefore, COSA recommends that the State Regents explore ways to expand the use of AP courses and CLEP tests within high schools in Oklahoma.

- COSA commends the State Regents on approving the policy on "The Assessment of Students for the Purpose of Instructional Improvement and State System Accountability," (II-2-117). Additionally, COSA recommends including some common elements on student opinions to complement the current entry, mid-point, and exit student assessment systems for the purposes of regional and national comparisons.

- Research indicates that student success in college is predicated, among other things, on the rigor of students' high school course work. Beginning in fall 1997, the high school units required for college entry will increase from 11 courses to 15. COSA supports the State Regents' efforts to develop a comprehensive strategy designed to inform high school students and their parents of course work and high school preparation needed to succeed in college. Secondly, COSA supports the State Regents' continued development of a comprehensive strategy designed to inform high school students, their parents, teachers, and schools of whether or not the courses provided meet the required rigor to prepare students for college.

- Data collection and analysis are primary benchmarks for policy review. COSA recommends that the State Regents' research staff further examine the results of this and other studies to determine whether or not additional elements and information may need to be added to the current Unitized Data System. In addition, COSA recommends that a study to evaluate the costs and benefits of developing a unitized financial aid data system be initiated by the State Regents.

- Finally, it is recommended that any policy recommendations that may arise from the above or further study of these data receive a thorough hearing and discussion before implementation, including sharing between and among all State Regents' advisory committees.

In conclusion, COSA reiterates that time-to-degree is a narrow measure of student success that does not account for the different institutional missions and student educational goals and objectives. In contrast, student success should be viewed more broadly, as a continuum of education that begins in elementary school, progresses through the completion of a postsecondary degree or other educational or career goal, and results in a commitment to lifelong learning. To that end, student persistence, or continuous enrollment to a degree, should be the primary measure of student success, not time-to-degree.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

FACTORS INFLUENCING TIME-TO-DEGREE COMPLETION

The following is a review of selected studies and/or reports concerning factors extending the length of time it takes college students to earn a baccalaureate degree.

The NCES cites five primarily student controlled factors extending time-to-degree: (1) students delaying entrance; (2) changing schools; (3) changing majors; (4) stopping out [discontinuing school for one or more semesters]; and (5) taking a reduced course load for financial, academic, or social reasons.

A survey of students in the California system of higher education completed by the California State Postsecondary Education Commission (1988) found several factors which seem to have had the greatest influence on California students' time-to-degree. Among them, nearly two-thirds of the students surveyed mentioned taking extra courses out of interest as having a substantial influence on time-to-degree. Sixty percent also mentioned changing majors and having to work as important factors in taking more than four years. Carrying a reduced course load, the need for better advising, and having trouble getting major requirements when needed were also cited as reasons for delays in graduation.

The report also noted that transfer students, even those transferring between institutions in the university systems, were more likely to experience delay in graduating in four years than non-transfer students. The commission's report concluded by defining a "successful" student (one who graduates within the traditional four years) as a student of high academic ability who receives college credit for courses taken in high school, never fails or repeats a course, and does not change majors.

Philip Garcia, in his research at California State University concerning graduation and time-to-degree, suggests that factors affecting time-to-degree include, but may not be limited to, students who complete only 12 units a semester are fated to take up to six years to complete a degree; and students pursuing science, engineering, and agricultural degrees often must complete total unit loads that go well beyond the traditional 124 semester units. Garcia also found that students who enter college as undeclared majors may have to participate in more prerequisite courses than others. Students who change from one discipline to another may have a more difficult time than others finishing their degree requirements. Students who enter under special admission criteria may have to enroll in a battery of pre-college courses before attempting general education requirements, therefore, lengthening time-to-degree completion.

Studies also single out socioeconomic background and academic preparation as those entering characteristics most likely to influence persistence as well as time-to-undergraduate degree. A report entitled, *Background and Academic Characteristics of Freshmen Entering University of California-Davis*, describes certain characteristics--socioeconomic background and academic preparation--of freshmen entering the University of California-Davis in fall

1988 and examines the possible influence of these characteristics on persistence to graduation. The report's findings are summarized below.

- Asian freshmen entering as the most academically well prepared group -- they came from relatively modest socioeconomic backgrounds. They graduate at the highest rate among racial-ethnic groups attending the University of California-Davis (76 percent).

- White freshmen came academically well prepared and from the most favorable socioeconomic backgrounds. They graduate at the second highest rate (73 percent).

- Filipino freshmen generally came from moderately affluent, well educated backgrounds and were fairly well prepared for university study. Their graduation rate (62 percent) places them near the middle of the groups included in the report.

- Chicano freshmen, as a group, come from families least affluent and with the lowest levels of formal education. They rank in the middle of all groups in academic preparation and graduate in the middle ranges (57 percent).

- Black freshmen enter less prepared academically for university study than any other racial-ethnic group. Their family backgrounds tend to place them at the low end of the socioeconomic spectrum and they graduate at the lowest rate (41 percent) among all groups.

This University of California-Davis report notes that racial and ethnic differences in graduation rates is well documented. However, it finds that when characteristics like academic preparation and socioeconomic status are considered, differences among racial-ethnic groups appear to vanish or be reversed, indicating a possible indirect effect of race or ethnicity on educational outcomes. Put simply, race alone does not appear to explain group differences in degree attainment. However, academic preparation and socioeconomic status, factors which are often divided among racial-ethnic lines, do seem to explain degree attainment differentials.

Students defined as Black and Chicano, who had the lowest proportion of students indicating a family income of over $35,000 (41 and 43 percent, respectively), also had the lowest graduation rates (41 and 57 percent, respectively). White and Filipino students, who were shown to have higher proportions of students from families with incomes exceeding $35,000 (84 and 68 percent, respectively), also had the highest graduation rates (73 and 62 percent, respectively). For Asians, there appeared to be less of a connection between family income and academic preparation and graduation rates than any other group. Only 50 percent of Asian families had incomes above $35,000; however, Asian students had the highest graduation rates (76 percent).

Consistent with this finding is a national U.S. Department of Education study (1988) of 1980 high school graduates entering college before 1982 which shows that among students with high socioeconomic status, 43 percent had earned their baccalaureate degree by 1986, while

only 30 percent of middle-high status, 20 percent of medium-low status, and 15 percent of low status had received their degrees within the same time frame.

A report by Connecticut State University (1992) compares time-to-degree for "native" students, students who graduate from the institution in which they initially enrolled, and transfer students to see if any significant differences appear. The study found that transfer students tended to have longer periods of time from first enrollment, ranging from 4 to 35 years, while non-transfers took 4 to 16 years. About 23 percent of transfer students and only 9 percent of "native" students stopped out, seemingly indicating a greater tendency for transfer students to take time off than "natives." Transfers were also shown to be twice as likely to enroll part time than "natives."

Loss of credit on transfer did not seem to be an important issue for many of the transfers. Over 72 percent of transfers lost nine or less credits. One-third of those lost only three or less credits.

There were several reasons for the non-acceptance of credit. Over half (58 percent) of the transfer students "lost" credit because of earning grades of a "D" or less. Many students (47 percent) lost credit because that credit was for remedial courses. Approximately 42 percent of transfers "lost" credit in credit conversion (from one credit awarding system to another). While "losing" credit can lengthen time-to-degree, so too can failure of accepted credit to fulfill degree requirements. This phenomenon may best be explained by 46 percent of transfers versus only 18 percent of "native" students accumulating 16 or more credits in excess of the minimum requirements for their degree. The researchers found switching majors or minors between or within higher education institutions as the primary reason.

The study found several student and institutional factors as primary contributors to increased time-to-degree. The student factors were taking less than 15 credits, changing majors, and faculty advisement. Some noted institutional factors included inconvenient provisions for student advising, unclear information as to program requirements with which advisors are familiar, and inadequate class scheduling.

Finally, parents can also serve as a barometer as to the reasons why their children took more than four years to graduate. Parents clearly sit on both sides of the fence; that is, they want their children to have the most positive college experience possible, but they also have limited resources and want their children, who attend college, to finish their degree in a timely manner.

A study conducted by Timothy Sanford, et al. (1994) sought to determine, in the eyes of the parents, what took their children longer than four years to complete their college degree. The findings revealed that, according to the parents, the reasons why their children took longer than four years to graduate included:

- Changed majors (55.5 percent);
- Felt no pressure to finish in four years (24.5 percent);

- Courses needed to graduate not always available (22.5 percent);
- Had to work while enrolled (21.5 percent).

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Student Advisory Board to the Oklahoma State Regents
and the
Council on Student Affairs

DEGREE COMPLETION SURVEY

Dear Student:

The Student Advisory Board and the Council on Student Affairs serve as primary advisory panels to the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, the Chancellor and State Regents' staff concerning issues and educational policies of importance to students. Both groups endeavor to assist in the delivery of quality educational programs and student support services offered by state system institutions. Information gathered from this survey will achieve a better understanding of how undergraduate students are affected by their college experience.

DIRECTIONS: Circle the appropriate answer that best reflects your opinion. Where appropriate, please share your comments in writing.

Definition: A bachelor's degree is the academic title conferred on an individual by an institution of higher education in recognition of the student's completion of a course of study.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. **What is your sex?**

   a. Male b. Female

2. **Marital Status?**

   a. Married c. Divorced
   b. Single d. Widowed

3. **Your college classification?**

   a. Freshman d. Senior
   b. Sophomore e. 5th year senior
   c. Junior f. Other (Specify) _____

4. **What is your race/ethnicity?**

   a. African-American
   b. Native American
   c. Hispanic, Chicano or Spanish-speaking American
   d. Caucasian
   e. Asian American
   f. Other

5. **Oklahoma resident?**

   a. Yes b. No

6. **How old are you?**

   a. less than 17 d. 22 - 24
   b. 17-19 e. 25 - 30
   c. 20 - 21 f. 30 or older

7. **Institution where you are currently enrolled?**

   a. Comprehensive university (OU and OSU)
   b. 4 year regional university
   c. 2 year college (junior/community/technical)
   d. Private institution

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DEGREE COMPLETION INFORMATION

8. At any point prior to or during your college educational experience did you do any career exploration before choosing a major?

a. Yes b. No

9. What is your current academic major? _____

10. How many times have you changed your academic major?

a. Never changed major b. Once c. Twice
d. Three or more times

11. Your reason(s) for changing majors: _____

12. Has a change of major negatively affected your expected completion/graduation date?

a. Yes b. No

13. On the average, how many hours do you carry during fall and spring semester combined? ____

14. If you are planning to earn a bachelor's degree, how many years do you anticipate it taking?

a. less than 4 years b. 4 years c. 4.5 years
d. 5 years e. 5.5 years f. 6 or more years

If more than four, why? _____

15. If you have transferred credit hours from another institution, please check the appropriate response. ***Check all that apply.***

a. Transferred more than 30 hours from a two year college
b. Transferred less than 30 hours from a two year college
c. Transferred credit hours from another bachelor's degree granting college/university
d. Transferred credit hours from two or more institutions of higher education
e. Transferred credit hours from another Oklahoma college/university
f. Transferred credit hours from an out-of-state college/university

16. Have you taken any courses that were not counted as college credit (i.e., zero level or remedial courses)?

a. Yes b. No

If yes, how many hours?

a. 1-3 b. 4-6 c. 7-9
d. 10 or more

COLLEGE LEVEL EXAMINATION PROGRAM

17. Does the institution you are currently attending offer College Level Examination Program (CLEP) testing?

a. Yes b. No c. Don't know

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18. **Have you taken a College Level Examination Program (CLEP) test?**

a. Yes b. No

If yes, how many credit hours have you received for CLEP testing?

a. 3 or less b. 4-6 c. 7-12 d. 13 or more

ADVANCED PLACEMENT INFORMATION

19. **Did your high school have advance placement courses?**

a. Yes b. No c. Don't know

20. **Did you take any advanced placement courses for college credit?**

a. Yes b. No

If yes, (1) **Identify the institution(s) which awarded the college credit for your advanced placement courses:**

_____

(2) **How many credit hours were awarded to you?**

a. 3 or less b. 4-6 c. 7-12
d. 13 or more

CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT INFORMATION

21. **Did you receive college credit through concurrent enrollment in high school?**

a. Yes b. No

If yes, (1) How many college credit hours did you receive through concurrent enrollment?

a. 1 - 3 b. 4-6 c. 7 or more

(2) At what college/university were you concurrently enrolled?

_____

SUMMER COURSE(S) INFORMATION

22. **Have you ever taken collegiate level summer session classes?**

a. Yes b. No

If yes, (1) How many hours? _____

(2) At what institution(s)? _____

(3) How many summer sessions?

a. 1 b. 2 c. 3 d. 4 or more

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STUDENT EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

23. As a student, do you (or did you) have a job during the fall and spring semesters?

a. Yes b. No

If yes, on the average, how many hours a week do (or did) you work? _____

24. Has working lengthened the time required to complete your degree program?

a. Yes b. No c. Don't know

25. Is employment required for or related to your degree program?

a. Yes b. No

If yes, how many hours of credit do you receive? _____

EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES INFORMATION

26. How many hours a week do you spend involved in extra-curricular activities (i.e., athletics, campus clubs, intramural sports, etc.)?

a. None b. 1-5 hours c. 6-10 hours d. More

27. How have extra curricular activities affected your ability to complete your degree program?

a. Positively b. Negatively c. Not at all

28. Thank you for your opinion on the Degree Completion Survey.

Please list below any problem areas you have experienced as an undergraduate student while attending an Oklahoma higher education institution.

Please return the completed survey to your campus student government association or the Vice President/Dean of Student Affairs office by October 13, 1995.

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ENDNOTES

ENDNOTES

[1] Oklahoma State Regents. "Policy Statement on the Assessment of Students for Purposes of Instructional Improvement and State System Accountability," (II-2-117).

[2] Garcia, Philip. "Graduation and Time to Degree: A Research Note from California State University. AIR 1994 Annual Forum Paper (May 26, 1994).

[3] Knight, William, "Why the Five-Year (or longer) Baccalaureate Degree? An Exploratory Study of Time to Degree Attainment:" AIR 1994 Annual Forum Paper, June 1994.

[4] Alexander Astin is a noted researcher and scholar with the American Council on Higher Education and the Institute for Higher Education Policy.

[5] Institute for High Education Policy. "The Next Step: Student Aid for Student Success," (June 1995).

[6] U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics College Graduation Surveys, "Indicator of the Month," October 1993.

[7] Blanco, Cheryl D. "Doing More With Less: Approaches to Shortening Time to Degree": State Higher Education Executive Officers; September 2, 1994.

[8] State of Illinois Board of Higher Education. "Baccalaureate Student Graduation, Time-To-Degree, and Retention at Illinois Public Universities," (May 3, 1994).

[9] *ibid.*

[10] *ibid.*

[11] Garcia,(May 26, 1994).

[12] Sanford, Timothy, et al. "Parents' Perceptions of Students' Time to Degree," AIR 1994 Annual Forum Paper, (June 1994).

[13]Colorado Commission on Higher Education. "Enhancement of Efficiencies Toward the Completion of Degree Programs by State-Supported Institutions of Higher Education," (December 1993).

[14] The Chronicle on Higher Education. "This Year's Freshmen: A Statistical Profile," (January 12, 1996). (Reporting on American Council on Education data).

[15] *ibid.*

[16] The Institute for High Education Policy (June 1995).

[17] Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, "Comparison of Graduation Rates for Scholarship Athletes and All Students by Sport, Race, and Gender," September 1995.

[18] NCES, (October 1993).

[19] Colorado Commissions on Higher Education (December 1993).

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[20] Illinois study (May 3, 1994).

[21] Garcia, (May 26, 1994).

[22] Colorado Commission on Higher Education (December 1993).

[23] "Parents," (June 1994).

[24] Garcia, (May 26, 1994).

[25] Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, "The Study of Success of Comunity College Transfer Students in The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education," (November 18, 1994).

[26] The Chronicle, (January 12, 1996). (Reporting on American Council on Education data).

[27] NCES, (October 1993).

[28] Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, "Policy Statement on Undergraduate Degree Requirements and Articulation," (April 1994).

[29] Astin, Alexander, *Minorities in American Higher Education, Twelfth Annual Status Report*; San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, (1993).

[30] NCES, (October 1993).

[31] The Institute for High Education Policy (June 1995).

[32] Some of the categories of SAB survey respondent data may not total 100 percent because of non-responses from the students surveyed.

[33] On the SAB survey, "Other" was an option made available to those students who did not feel that the categories of African-American, Native-American, Hispanic, Caucasian, and Asian American accurately described their race or ethnicity.

[34] A Nonresident Alien is any person who is not a naturalized citizen of the United States.

[35] The UDS data in this section is not intended to total to 100 percent. It merely shows some select figures of student activity that may be of interest to the reader. As the focus of this study is on time-to-degree, other aspects of student activity were not reviewed in depth. For future study, a more in-depth analysis of persisting students and students not enrolled in the State System is recommended.

[36] The fields of study of Asians may account for their four-year graduation expectations. For instance, Asians were four times more likely than the general population of students to be enrolled in engineering programs, whereas a five-year baccalaureate degree for full-time students may be more common than in other disciplines.

[37] Astin, Alexander, *Minorities in American Higher Education, Twelfth Annual Status Report*; San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, (1993).

[38] The Institute for High Education Policy (June 1995).

[39] The Chronicle, (January 12, 1996). (Reporting on American Council on Education data).

[40] Only students who were initially enrolled in baccalaureate degree granting institutions were analyzed in this since all students who entered into two-year institutions must transfer to complete a baccalaureate degree.

[41] Illinois study, (May 3, 1994).

[42] Colorado Commission on Higher Education, (December 1993).

[43] Colorado Commission on Higher Education. "Efforts to Enhance Timely Completion of Baccalaureate Degree Programs at State-Supported Institutions of Higher Education (In Compliance with Directives of SB 92-155)" (January 1994).

[44] Garcia, (May 26, 1994).

[45] Knight, (June 1994).